



## LIVELIHOODS, CHRONIC CONFLICT AND HUMANITARIAN RESPONSE: A REVIEW OF CURRENT APPROACHES

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*A large part of the populations of several countries – including the more remote and agriculturally 'difficult' areas – live in situations of chronic conflict or political instability. Livelihoods interventions in these situations must have the ability to incorporate both 'relief' and 'development' modes of operation; what might normally be regarded as life-saving humanitarian assistance can be programmed to provide livelihood support. A balance must be struck which respects humanitarian principles, and yet adapts sufficiently to local conditions through adequate participation and flexibility. There remains considerable debate as to whether livelihoods approaches in chronic conflict situations are compatible with humanitarian principles, particularly independence, neutrality and impartiality.*

### Policy conclusions

- The application of a livelihoods framework to situations of chronic conflict and political instability requires that:
  - vulnerability is placed more centrally;
  - political economy is integrated into the analysis; and
  - a temporal dimension that includes the pre-conflict situation is incorporated.
- Livelihoods programming requires a deeper level of contextual understanding than conventional humanitarian interventions: a wealth of assessment tools exist, but challenges remain in the identification of appropriate forms of livelihood support.
- Agencies' mandates and experience can both restrict and provide opportunities for livelihoods approaches in situations of chronic conflict.
- Capacity-building as part of a livelihoods approach includes a range of possibilities: enhancing productive assets; skills training among individuals and groups in target communities; building capacity within implementing agencies; and awareness-raising at national and international levels through advocacy campaigns.

### Introduction

In protracted emergencies – and specifically in situations of chronic conflict – humanitarian assistance has typically been intended only as immediate life-saving support. Other forms of aid – including various forms of livelihood support – can also help in assisting people and communities to survive and/or cope with these situations in the longer-term. Increasingly, agencies are coming to question the value of only providing life-saving support over long periods of time in chronic emergencies. However, attempts to provide aid beyond the saving of human life in the context of chronic conflict or political instability are fraught with problems to which current livelihoods analysis contributes only in a limited way.

This paper summarises a longer review of the tools being used by agencies to try to understand the impact of conflict on livelihoods, and highlights key features of livelihood interventions in chronic conflict situations. The review itself<sup>1</sup> is based on very practical concerns, but these concerns inevitably relate to more conceptual issues, in particular the link between short-term humanitarian objectives and longer term developmental objectives, as well as concerns relating to the necessity of providing livelihood support in principled ways that do not exacerbate existing tensions relating to the conflict or have other unintended negative impacts. These conceptual issues have been articulated in terms of the need to link rights-based approaches with livelihoods approaches, or to develop a better understanding of the political economy of conflict as part of the process of determining appropriate forms of livelihood support.

### The nature of political conflict

Since the end of the Cold War, state actors in many conflict situations in the South have weakened considerably in the face of globalisation and other changes, and non-state actors – rebel movements, militias, warlords – play increasingly important roles. This makes conflicts themselves more factionalised, fragmented and protracted; in some cases,

even a semi-permanent part of the political landscape. While it is often incorrect to characterise these conflicts purely in ethnic terms, politicised identities of various types (ethnic, religious, national, etc.) often play a role in fuelling crises. These conflicts are often at least partially about gaining access to resources, control over markets, labour, access routes, etc. The breakdown or collapse of state authority is often associated with the 'new wars', as both a cause and an effect. In this review we use the term 'chronic conflict and political instability' to describe these situations (Box 1).

Contemporary development policy largely views such wars as the result, rather than primarily a cause, of widespread underdevelopment and poverty, but the relationship between the two is to some extent circular. The redefinition of underdevelopment as the cause of the new wars, and the notion that development assistance has the potential to address the problem of conflict, has opened up new arenas of interventions by aid agencies in the 1990s, around the conflict/development nexus.

There has long been an overlap in the organisational mandates of agencies in terms of both responding to short-term crises and contributing to longer-term development, but these were classically thought of as separate kinds of activities, with crises linked to a distinctly short time frame.

### Box 1 Defining chronic conflict and political instability

The main characteristics of situations of chronic conflict and political instability include:

- seriously weakened or non-existent public institutions (executive, judicial, legislative) within the state in question;
- external legitimacy of the state withheld or contested;
- strong parallel or extra-legal economy;
- existence of, or high susceptibility to, violence;
- forced displacement: refugees and internally-displaced people;
- sections of the population deliberately excluded from enjoying basic rights;
- livelihoods highly vulnerable to external shocks;
- existence of serious poverty.

Source: Schafer (2002)

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But, as noted, crises – particularly political or conflict-related crises – have tended to become chronic or semi-permanent, and so some humanitarian agencies are beginning to go beyond life-saving measures and move towards the longer-term provision of support to livelihoods.

### Applying livelihoods analysis to chronic conflict situations

A livelihoods approach is one that takes as its starting point the actual livelihood assets and strategies that people use to achieve the outcomes they seek. Figure 1 presents a version of the DFID livelihoods framework modified for conflict situations, in which vulnerability is placed more centrally and ‘policies, institutions and processes’ (PIPs) are rendered more prominent. The prominent role of PIPs reflects the need to incorporate political economy analysis with livelihoods analysis in situations of chronic conflict and political instability.

Political economy analysis focuses on power and wealth relations and on the processes that create, sustain and transform these relationships over time; it is essentially concerned with understanding the interaction of political and economic processes and associated dynamics of power and powerlessness between different groups and institutions in society. In situations of chronic conflict, political economy is concerned both with political dynamics (such as group-based rebellion against the state) and with economic forces (such as war economies) – both ‘grievance’ and ‘greed’ – which are combined in changing patterns of power and vulnerability, creating both ‘winners’ and ‘losers’. Many of the issues addressed by political economy analysis can also be viewed through the lens of livelihoods analysis; indeed, a really complete livelihoods analysis might actually answer many of the same questions as a political economy analysis (Schafer, 2002).

Some of the features of livelihoods particularly relevant to situations of chronic conflict are presented in Box 2.

Yet it is also important to understand livelihoods and the dynamics of vulnerability and power not only in terms of

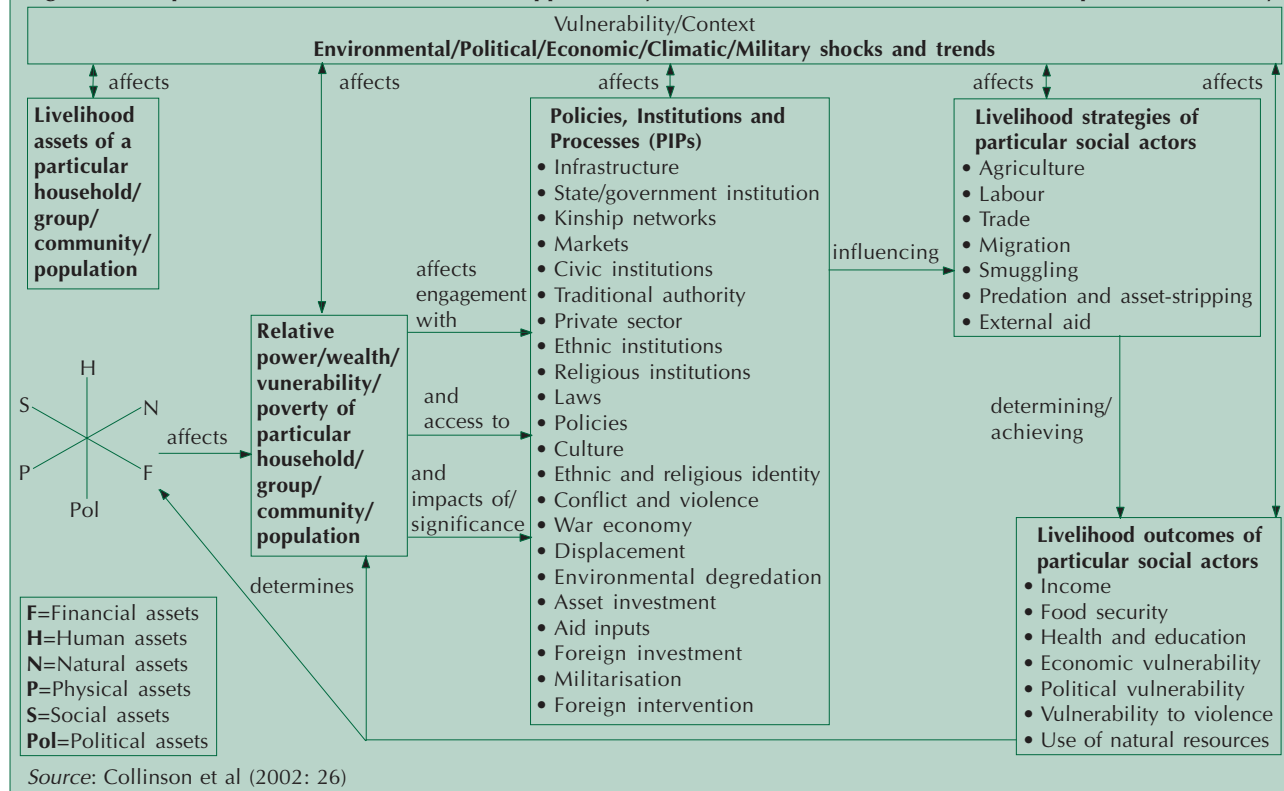
### Box 2 Some features of livelihoods relevant to chronic conflict situations

Household level	Broader livelihood and political economy context
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Displacement, forced migration or relocation in relation to social, legal and economic ties.</li> <li>• Changing household composition (due to death, abduction, displacement or migration) and impact on income generation, labour and productivity.</li> <li>• Asset levels – loss, depletion and maintenance of all asset types: natural, financial, physical, human and social.</li> <li>• Ways in which the above points, in combination with the broader context, affect livelihood strategies and livelihood outcomes for different groups.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Spatial patterns of political tension and physical insecurity.</li> <li>• Disruption to travel and transport and local markets – for both consumption and production – and wider economy.</li> <li>• Changing governance structures; control over markets, labour and resources through formal and informal institutions; service provision.</li> <li>• Changing power relations within and between groups and communities; underlying causes of conflict; strategies used by insurgents.</li> </ul>

the conflict and its associated impacts, but also in terms of the situation *prior to conflict*. In many cases, this may help to understand some of the factors that contributed to conflict in the first place, particularly where violence is an expression of the failure of development (i.e. the failure to address the causes of vulnerability).

Although the livelihoods framework (as in Figure 1) does not explicitly incorporate a temporal dimension, livelihoods analysis<sup>2</sup> has the ability to get beyond an overt focus on ‘the conflict’ to consider a longer historical trajectory of change and present a differentiated understanding of the impacts of and responses to conflict (e.g. for different groups of actors; according to spatial patterns; and at international, national, regional and local levels) that incorporates political, economic and social factors.

Figure 1 Adapted Livelihoods Framework to support analysis in situations of chronic conflict and political instability



## Livelihood assessment tools

If relief agencies are to programme for livelihoods (as distinct from life-saving), they will require a deeper level of understanding of both needs and the broader social, political and economic context. Acquiring such understanding requires time and the use of appropriate analytical tools and methods. Such tools must not only be capable of describing livelihood strategies and the broader context in which they exist but they must also be able to explain how different aspects of a particular situation relate to one another and to the past, and also attempt to predict what might happen in future for various different scenarios. Assessment tools for livelihoods programming must thus be descriptive, explanatory and predictive, as illustrated by Table 1.

Particular challenges exist in linking findings at household or community levels with wider economic and political trends, and in linking economic changes to political forces. One way of overcoming this is to continuously ask 'why?' questions, focused on the root causes of institutional constraints and power relations. In the context of a civil war, such questions are sensitive, and often raise as many questions as answers. Inevitably, this kind of underlying-cause analysis – whether undertaken from an explicitly rights-based perspective or from a political economy perspective – goes far beyond typical emergency needs assessment, and raises issues about who will analyse the information and for what purposes, and even what the security implications of such analysis might be.

Appropriate interventions cannot always immediately be identified from descriptive or explanatory assessment alone; understanding the whole picture is necessary before devising longer-term interventions. The use of scenario or contingency analysis has been suggested to help in forecasting future needs and possible interventions. A similar predictive assessment approach has been developed within food economy analysis. Benefits/harms analysis tools were developed by CARE for the purpose of analysing the potential impacts of interventions – both intended and unintended – and to devise methods of mitigating potential negative consequences of interventions, particularly in terms of human rights. Other predictive tools, such as conflict analysis and those that have developed out of the 'local capacities for peace' framework, tend to focus on the potentially harmful effects of interventions rather than on the identification of appropriate livelihood support.

Assessment approaches all necessitate detailed fieldwork, raising a number of practical considerations, including problems of access, and the risks posed not only to agency staff but also to participants or informants. Livelihoods assessments are, by definition, participatory, yet in particularly unstable situations, participation may be limited to consultation and the extraction of necessary data. The growing frequency with which participatory assessment

approaches appear to be used in situations of chronic conflict suggests that they offer a number of advantages, both in terms of the quality of the assessment itself and in terms of the learning experiences for the assessment monitors and the agencies involved.

The use of specific assessment tools alone may be insufficient in generating the level of information and analysis required for successful livelihoods programming. In rapidly changing situations it is necessary for agencies to be particularly well-informed, both for security reasons and also to ensure effective and appropriate programming. A 'culture of enquiry' is important, so that lessons can be learnt, and information drawn together and analysed as part of an on-going learning process. Independent monitoring and information systems have a crucial role to play, but these must be very well-linked to implementing agencies to influence programming decisions.

## Livelihoods programming in situations of chronic conflict

In general, assessment tools still tend to be used for the assessment of relief needs and the targeting of conventional relief inputs. The apparent disconnection between livelihoods assessment approaches and the identification of livelihoods interventions can partly be explained by the lack of tools, but also relates to the lack of clarity as to what constitutes a livelihoods intervention. Certainly, the conventional either/or distinction between 'development' and 'relief' assistance is unhelpful. In situations of chronic conflict, there are generally multiple problems to be addressed at multiple levels, and both forms of aid are often necessary to support the livelihoods of different sectors of the population. It is important, however, to balance these according to differentiated needs and the changing nature of the local situation.

A comparison of ICRC and SC-UK projects in Somalia presents two very different approaches to livelihoods support (see Table 2). The ICRC intervention – based on cash for work projects – was designed as a short-term response to assist households in building up their productive asset base with the longer-term objective of avoiding the need for food aid in the following season. As such, this approach can be characterised as 'saving lives *through* livelihoods'. In contrast, the SC-UK project – largely based on an integrated agricultural development approach with the flexibility to respond to short-term needs – can be characterised as 'saving lives *and* livelihoods': the livelihoods intervention itself was essentially aimed to provide long-term, developmental support, and relief-oriented, life-saving assistance was also possible when the need arose. Both types of approach can be effective, but are appropriate in different contexts and require very different types of institutional capacity on the part of the implementing agency.

**Table 1 Assessment tools relevant to livelihoods programming in situations of chronic conflict**

Type	Information required	Tools and approaches available
Descriptive	What livelihood strategies people are pursuing, and what their priorities are; severity of risks to livelihoods.	Profiling; personal testimonies; baseline studies; core indicators; asset-based analysis; CARE livelihood security approach; Food Economy Approach; Oxfam-UK livelihoods approach; structure and social impact of the war economy; vulnerability assessment and risk mapping.
Explanatory	Who is vulnerable and why; how does the present livelihoods context relate to past processes of change; how are household livelihood strategies influenced by macro-economic and political trends (i.e. war economies and power relations).	'Why' questioning and persistent probing; ICRC economic security analysis; CARE livelihood security approach; Food Economy Approach; market structure analysis; DFID good governance assessment framework; participatory poverty assessments.
Predictive	Appropriate types of livelihood support; feasibility of livelihood support; which institutions to work with; potentially harmful effects of livelihood support.	Scenario or contingency analysis; conflict analysis; local capacities for peace framework; Oxfam-GB net-benefit analysis; CARE benefits-harms tools.

The distinction between ‘saving lives *through* livelihoods’ and ‘saving lives *and* livelihoods’ helps to define the broader objective of the intervention itself and, as such, has important implications for programming and project design. Whilst the same distinction may not necessarily apply to all forms of livelihoods support, it is crucial that there is a very clear articulation of the problems to be addressed and the specific objectives of the suggested responses to ensure that interventions are designed to address actual needs effectively. In this way, it becomes quite possible for what might normally be regarded as a conventional form of life-saving humanitarian assistance to be programmed to provide livelihoods support; for example, the use of food aid in food-for-work programmes that aim to build up productive assets. What is important is the *rationale* on which the assistance is provided and the *way* in which it is programmed and delivered.

Table 2 summarises the various different forms of livelihoods projects included in the review in terms of their aim or rationale, their needs assessment method, and the way in which they are being implemented, focusing particularly on participation and capacity-building. The particularly wide range of approaches in relation to capacity building is notable.

Given the highly context-specific nature of livelihoods and chronic conflict, it is perhaps more appropriate to examine what is meant by a livelihoods ‘approach’ rather than specific livelihood projects or interventions. A number of elements recur within the projects reviewed, as

summarized in Box 3. Livelihoods approaches must have the capacity to incorporate both ‘relief’ and ‘developmental’ modes of operation; in some cases a particular intervention must be able to shift from one mode to the other. Although livelihood approaches may not be sustainable in themselves, they should aim to sustain livelihoods in both the short-term (to save lives) and the long-term (to build resilience and address vulnerability). It is largely through capacity-building and reducing vulnerability that livelihoods approaches have the potential to lead to long-lasting impacts.

### Implications for humanitarian practice

Humanitarian responses should ideally be driven by the specific needs identified within a given context, but agency mandates and experience (and also the analytical frameworks that inform their approaches) can both restrict and provide opportunities. For example, a long-term presence in a particular location may bring with it a strong local knowledge, but the mental shift required to enter into a new work mode can be considerable.

In principle, livelihood support is perhaps best achieved through partnerships in which different agencies or organisations draw on their respective expertise to best advantage. This might best be achieved through a common strategic approach rather than merely collaboration on specific projects, though, in practice, such levels of coordination are often fraught with problems.

Whether in chronic conflict or post-conflict situations, the role of information and assessment is crucial, but more

**Table 2 Features of sample livelihoods-based projects**

Intervention	Aim/rationale/approach	Needs assessment	Level of participation	Type of capacity-building
ICRC Cash for Work, Somalia	Mitigate future need for food aid by enhancing productive assets over a limited time period. Contribute to longer-term solution to problems of water availability and food production.	Mainly secondary source information focused at household level, combined with feasibility assessment.	Communities identify structures in need of rehabilitation and decide between food or cash payment; communities identify labourers who provide labour for payment.	Builds productive capacity through enhancing productive assets.
SC-UK Agricultural Support Programme, Somalia	Improve food security through agricultural extension, canal rehabilitation, water pumps and seed multiplication. Long-term approach allows for emergency seed distribution when necessary.	Survey based on Household Economy Approach. <i>Ad hoc</i> learning by project staff through engaging with local communities.	Community-driven approach; good links with most villages in the project area and good understanding of the population. Special emphasis on women’s participation.	Community training and agricultural demonstrations. Community organisation, village management committees, and enhanced role of women. Particular attention also given to staff development and internal capacity-building.
Community-based animal health services, S. Sudan	Rinderpest eradication and control/prevention/treatment of a limited range of locally-prioritised animal health problems.	Participatory baseline surveys; community dialogue to identify local priorities.	Regular contact with all sections of the community; participatory baseline surveys; community dialogue to identify local priorities; participatory M&E.	Training of community-based animal health workers, animal health auxiliaries and stockpersons, development of veterinary coordination committees.
Monitoring livelihoods in Liberia (SC-UK)	Empower communities to become self-reliant and reduce ‘dependency syndrome’ through building people’s analytical skills.	Participatory assessment based on Household Economy Approach.	Participatory assessments and facilitated group discussions for planning at community level.	Strengthening local people’s ability to identify activities to promote self-reliance. Information-sharing with partners for improved livelihoods understanding, and awareness-raising at all levels.
Oxfam International advocacy campaign against Israeli policy of closure in the West Bank	Recommendations to the international community, to the Government of Israel, to the Palestinian Authority, and to international donors, local and international aid agencies.	Research to document the social and economic impact of closure on rural Palestinian communities.	Experiences of particular households and individuals are documented as part of the campaign’s publicity materials.	Awareness-raising at international levels.



**Box 3 Livelihoods approaches in situations of chronic conflict and political instability**

- Operate at different and often multiple levels.
- Involve a range of activities, requiring different types of capacity within implementing agencies.
- Must be based on sound analytical understanding and predictive assessment of livelihoods and the broader political economy.
- Adopt a participatory approach and empower programme participants.
- Are flexible and responsive, with the capacity to incorporate both 'developmental' and 'relief' modes of operation.
- Promote capacity-building at local, agency and/or broader levels.
- Lead to long-lasting impacts.
- Should undertake long-term impact assessments and act on assessment findings.

work is needed to make effective use of such information and analysis in the design and implementation of programmes to support livelihoods.

**Livelihoods approaches in relation to human rights and humanitarian concerns**

In recent years there has been a major shift in the way that aid agencies are addressing both humanitarian and development concerns through the adoption of rights-based approaches into programming, and there is some evidence of complementarities between rights- and livelihoods-based approaches (Conway et al, 2002). Some of the emphasis on rights in the context of conflict has to do with rights of access to the necessary inputs, but it is also concerned with the underlying causes of poverty, conflict and rights-denial. This requires a deeper analysis of the social and political context that can be achieved through political economy analysis.

Adopting a livelihoods approach in situations of chronic conflict does not necessarily raise problems for humanitarian action, but it does potentially raise problems regarding the application of the classic humanitarian principles, particularly independence, neutrality and impartiality. There are also doubts over whether rights-based approaches would fully reflect these principles. In other contexts, this debate has arisen in the form of both the expression and criticism of 'new humanitarianism' (Box 4).

Livelihoods approaches are not necessarily a component of 'new humanitarianism', but they do raise some of the same set of issues. They can be both a means of addressing short-term, humanitarian response objectives, and addressing longer-term objectives of reducing vulnerability. Addressing underlying causes need not come at the expense of also addressing acute symptoms of a problem, but in either case, embedded in a livelihoods approach are assumptions about working in solidarity with communities, building their capacity, and strengthening their access to resources that clearly go beyond either just the alleviation of short-term suffering, or a strict application of classic humanitarian principles, particularly that of neutrality. The 'neutrality/

**Box 4 New humanitarianism**

New humanitarianism is variously described as encompassing several approaches or underlying assumptions:

- recognising the risk that aid can do more harm than good;
- proposing a shift away from needs-based approaches to rights-based approaches;
- suggesting an increased role for advocacy in public policy;
- analysing the underlying causes of poverty and conflict;
- actively addressing both the immediate alleviation of the effects of conflict – and the promotion of self reliance or goal-oriented 'developmental relief'.

solidarity' issue remains a major unresolved question of contemporary debate over future directions of humanitarianism.

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<sup>1</sup> The review is published by ODI as a series of eleven Working Papers, including a synthesis paper, from which the current NRP is drawn (see Longley and Maxwell, 2003). The Working Papers are available at [http://www.odi.org.uk/publications/working\\_papers/livelihood\\_chronic\\_conflict.html](http://www.odi.org.uk/publications/working_papers/livelihood_chronic_conflict.html)

<sup>2</sup> Livelihoods analysis refers to differentiated and multi-level research that examines changes over time; it is based on empirical investigations into the livelihood strategies of households and communities, in which micro-level findings are situated within a macro context to explain the social, economic and political factors relating to poverty and vulnerability.

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**The Livelihoods and Chronic Conflict Working Paper Series**

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The Livelihoods and Chronic Conflict Working Paper Series has been jointly funded by the Sustainable Livelihoods Support Office and the Conflict and Humanitarian Affairs Department of the UK Department for International Development.



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## Understanding Livelihoods in Rural India: Diversity, Change and Exclusion

Understanding Livelihoods is a set of short guidance notes intended for an audience of senior policymakers, managers and practitioners who may wish to commission work on livelihood change. They provide a distillation of some of the lessons learned from the ODI Livelihood Options study in India ([www.livelihoods.info](http://www.livelihoods.info)) on the 'how' of studying livelihood diversification and change. They can be downloaded from this website, and small numbers of hardcopy are available from John Farrington at ODI ([j.farrington@odi.org.uk](mailto:j.farrington@odi.org.uk)).

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